

Autism and Suicidality Fact Sheet

Prevalence:

For autistic individuals, estimates of the prevalence of suicide ideation range between 19.7 % and 66% and estimates for the prevalence of suicide attempts range between 1.8% and 36% (Cassidy, 2020).

A recent review of 372 coroner reports across 2 counties found that 41.4% of individuals who died by suicide were autistic or possibly autistic, thus highlighting the prevalence of suicidality in individuals who have not yet been diagnosed (Cassidy et al., 2022).

Reasons for Increased Prevalence:

- Autistic individuals are more likely to be bullied or ostracised than non-autistic individuals. Autistic individuals may also have weaker support systems due to this.
- Autistic individuals are more likely to be unemployed or have employment difficulties than non-autistic individuals (Cassidy et al., 2022).
- Autistic individuals may have difficulties naming or recognising their emotions (alexithymia; Berthoz et al., 2013).
- Autistic individuals may have difficulties with counterfactual thinking (not understanding the difference between reality and fiction) which means they do not understand the permanence of death
- Autistic individuals may experience cognitive inflexibility which lead them to believe suicide is the only option (Pacquette-Smith et al., 2014)
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Autistic individuals with higher prevalence rates of suicidality:

- Individuals who have received a late diagnosis of autism (Cassidy et al., 2014).
- Transgender and gender non-conforming autistic individuals (Strang et al., 2021).

The Here to Help 'resources', which include but are not limited to, website, information sheets, and in person workshops are intended to provide general information only. The 'resources' provided by 'Here to Help' do not replace, or supersede, professional and/or medical advice. Users should take professional advice before taking action which contradicts previous medical guidance. So far as permissible by law, SJOG does not accept any liability related to individual's use or interpretation of the 'resources' provided.

Whilst we have selected some resources from other organisations which we believe will be helpful, we accept no liability for the content of these resources.'

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- Autistic men and autistic women are equally likely to die by suicide, which is different to the general population, where men are significantly more likely to die by suicide (Newell et al., 2023).
- Unlike in the general population, IQ is not a protective factor against suicidality for autistic individuals. In fact, individuals with the largest gap between IQ and adaptive functioning (namely those who are highly cognitively able but lack adaptive functioning capacity) are at greatest risk of mental health crises and suicidality (Kraepel et al., 2017).

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